THE STORY THAT TOOK

By INEZ HAYNES GILLMORE

THERE was nobody in the ladies waiting-room of the Walden station but herself. No one else came in. She waited and waited. Finally, she went over to the ticket agent's window.

"Will you tell me, please," she asked, "if you happened to notice a young girl waiting here for the 6:15 train?"

"No, lady," the ticket agent answered promptly; "there wasn't nobody in here."

"I was just wondering—I expected somebody here to meet me, and I thought maybe she missed me—but perhaps nobody came."

"I didn't see nobody," the station agent reasserted.

The door opened. The girl flashed about with a start and a quick glance of hope, but it was a young man who entered, and she turned again to her informant.

"Can you tell me," she went on, "of any church in Walden where there is to be an entertainment to-night—a sort of church social?"

"No, I haven't heard of anything of the kind." He turned to the opposite window, that looked into the men's waiting room, and answered the questions that were directed to him. He took from their clamps some tickets, stamped them rapidly, and sold them, continuing his conversation with the pair of men who had bought them.

The girl waited. "Do you know of any way I could find out," she timidly addressed the back that was turned to her, "if there is to be such an affair, and where it's to be held?"

"Well, I should think you'd have to go round to all the churches and see. I don't know of any other way. You can't get them by telephone." He renewed his bantering talk at the other window.

The girl was silent an instant, thinking. Then she walked over to a window and looked out. There was a pathetic droop to her figure and she stared unseeingly up the road. Her lips began to quiver and her eyes, gradually, to fill with tears. She wore a long pongee coat and a straw hat, simply trimmed. She was a slender creature, of medium height, and delicate proportions. Her skin was white and a little freckled. Her eyes were dark and pensive. Because of the luminous purple stain on their lids, and of supplementing soft shadows under them, they seemed bigger than they really were. Her abundant brown hair was shadowy; the line it made about her forehead and neck was prettily scalloped. Just above each of her temples a feathery spiral of a curl disengaged itself from the rest and hung down in front of her ears. This and her little pointed chin, together with a certain fascinating irregularity of her features, gave her a look that was quaintly witch-like.

"I beg your pardon," a voice at her elbow interrupted her reflections; "I wonder if I can be of any assistance to you?"

She turned immediately. It was the young man who had just come in. She stood for a few seconds trying, by biting her lips, to stop their trembling. Gradually she forced the tears back.

"You are very kind," she said at last. "I don't know what to do. I—I—You see I'm going to take part in an entertainment to-night in a church here in Walden. There was to be a girl here at the train to meet me. Nobody came and I'm afraid there's some mistake about it. I don't know what to do. I don't know the names of any of the people who are getting up the entertainment, and I don't don't know what church it is—or anything." She stopped and bit her lips again. "You see," she went on, "they hired me to come to-night. That's why I feel so badly about disappointing them. But I guess the best thing for me to do is to go home."

"Oh no," he protested; "don't do that. You mustn't do that. I'm very sure we can find out what church is celebrating to-night. But I don't understand. How did it happen that they didn't write you anything about it?"

"Oh, you see," she explained further, "they—she—it was a woman—engaged me over the telephone. Her voice was a little indistinct at times and somebody kept interrupting her. All I got was that it was an entertainment to be given at a church at Walden, and that somebody would meet me at the station and take me there."

"Did she give you her name?" the young man asked.

"No, she forgot, I guess—and it never occurred to me to ask for it. Bob—my brother—says that's just the way women do business."

Perhaps the young man thought so. In spite of palpable efforts toward self-control, a smile forced itself to his lips, and his eyes twinkled. The girl herself was smiling a little by this time.

"Well, now, I'll tell you exactly what we'll do," he said briskly; "my automobile is outside, and I'll take you around to all the churches until we find the one that you belong to."

"Oh, that's very good of you. I—I don't think I ought. I'm afraid it's bothering you too much."

"Not a bit. I shall enjoy it very much. I haven't a thing to do. In fact, I think it will be something of a lark. And it won't take more than an hour, you know—the distances here are very short. Excuse me a moment; I'll get the necessary information from the ticket agent."

The girl watched him as he stood talking. There was an air of quiet strength about his tall figure, a look of physical cleanness, that was in some odd way moral, too, about his irregular bright face. He had steady gray eyes and close-cropped bright brown hair. His long automobile coat and his visored cap gave him a distinguished look.

"By the way, my name is Arden Bennett," he said, when he rejoined her, "and I am more than pleased to make your acquaintance." He opened the door and they walked up the platform to where the automobile awaited them.

"My name is Fredericka Gaston," she announced simply, "and I'm rendering up thanks to heaven that I've made your acquaintance."

"Thank you," he returned, smilingly; "this is the Secret Service, at your disposal—now christened for the first time—and in deference to its most pleasing adventure. You'll sit in the front seat with me—thank you, yes—I sit at the right."

They started forward at a smart pace. The brown dusty road rolled itself up like a ribbon under them, and the green of the woods on either side massed itself into a continuous soft hedge. The hill, that they began presently to climb, ran fairly straight upward and imprinted a smooth, clean cut line of road and the serrated outline of contiguous bunches of fir trees on the banks of golden cloud that the approaching sunset had exorcised.

"I find," he said, "that this town is long on churches; no less than six. Isn't that like New England? I'll give you odds that there isn't a billiard room or a bowling alley. There's the Catholic, Episcopalian, Baptist, Methodist, Orthodox and Unitarian. We'll cut the Catholic church out at the start. They don't have church festivals do they? to their credit, I think. Now, why can't we do some Sherlock Holmes work over this matter, Miss Gaston? Let's see what we can deduce, in regard to the denomination of the church, from the character of the entertainment they're giving. What are they going to do?"

"Why, you see I—I—I—" she faltered, "I don't know—it never occurred to me to ask."

He smiled down at her amusedly. "Well, what are you going to do?

"Oh, I'm a story-teller. I'm going to tell stories."

"Why, it must be a children's party."

"No; she especially stipulated that I have stories suitable for grown people. I'm going to tell a fairy story, and a fable, two adventures and two ghost stories."

"Ghost stories!" He pounced upon the words triumphantly. "Did you tell her you were going to tell ghosts tories?"

"Yes, and she was very much amused and pleased."

"Now let me see who'd be likely to stand for ghost stories," he meditated; "the Orthodox couldn't, the Baptists and Methodists wouldn't, the Episcopalians might——"

"Would the Unitarians stand for them, do you think?"

"The Unitarians! My child, they'll stand for anything. I ought to know. I'm a Unitarian myself. That settles it. And I might as well tell you that the search is as good as over with. Unitarian it is. Hurrah for Sherlock Holmes! The Adventure of the Mislaid Church."

"Of course," she agreed, happily, "it couldn't be any other."

"And this is the month of June. They're giving a strawberry festival. Oh, this is too easy. It's like magic. It's like stealing rattles from babies. It's like getting money from popper. Say, I'm almost ashamed."

"Oh I am so grateful to you," she burst out. "You see," she said, suddenly, as if propelled into confidence by an overpowering impulse, "my brother Bob and I—we're all alone in the world. My father and mother are both dead. Bob supports me and takes care of me. I keep house, but I have a great deal of time on my hands—time that I don't know what to do with. Two years ago we came down from Horton—that's in the middle of the state. I don't know anybody in Boston and often I am very lonely. It occurred to me over a year ago that I might do something with story-telling. I've always told stories to children, and rather successfully, and then, besides, I like it. Well, I had some circulars printed and I sent them out to newspapers and women's clubs and churches and kindergartens, and every place and thing I could think of. And then I waited. And I waited. And I waited. And, do you know, I never heard a solitary thing from one of them until that woman called me up on the telephone the other day. That's why I was so silly in the station. I do so want to make a success of it. I do want to help Bob—he's so good to me. My heart went down into my boots when I found there was nothing for me to do but to go home. Really, I can't tell you how much I appreciate your kindness."

"Please, please, don't say that again. The gratitude is all mine. You've rescued me from the boredom of a whole evening alone. I don't know so very many people myself. I'm from the West. I'm taking a graduate course at Harvard."

"It's great fun for me to be going about like this in search of my church," she remarked, "because I never have been in an automobile before. After I've told lots and lots of stories, and have become famous, I'm going to buy one to put in Bob's Christmas stocking."

"Do you mean to say you never have been in an automobile before?" he asked with a great appearance of solemnity.

"Never."

"Why, you haven't told me any of the three stock automobile stories yet."

"I don't know them. What are they?"

"And you've refrained from calling it my automobubble. You haven't referred to it as my 'fiery steed.' You haven't said 'See how it champs its bit.'"

"What are the stories?"

"And you haven't even asked me if I hadn't better get out and give it a pailful of water and a bucket of oats."

"What are the stories?"

"Well, story number one, people always tell. It's as inevitable as 'You wouldn't believe that sunset if you saw it in a painting,' or 'I'd rather have a tooth pulled than have my picture taken.' I mean everybody tells it except you. I've never known a case before when it didn't happen. I'm afraid now I'm dreaming. Don't wake me. Oh, I've been driven to keeping tabs on it. In the last three months I've heard it—and in this very machine—exactly thirty-nine times. I've worked up a mechanical ha-ha that makes the welkin ring. It frightens people. They don't tell me any more stories. Well here goes for the fortieth time. Three children were playing on a street when an automobile went by. 'Let's play automobile,' one of them said. 'I'll be the automobile, and you'll be the driver.' 'What'll I be?' asked the third. 'Oh, you, you can be the ——.' Hi, here we are. Mademoiselle, I have the honor to present the Unitarian Church at your service."

The girl looked up eagerly. Just ahead, set in a trim lawn, was a yellow stone church. A huge ivy softened its angles and those of the building, evidently the parsonage, adjoining it.

"I should think it would be lighted," she said, and her voice was a little troubled.

"It is lighted dimly. It's only 7 o'clock now. They're not wasting their gas, you see. Ah! what did I tell you? Here they come—they're expecting you."

From the parsonage door there emerged a little dumpy, kindly-faced clergyman. He came directly toward them. Bennett steered the auto neatly up to the sidewalk. Then he jumped out and helped Fredericka to alight. Fredericka moved up the concrete walk. Her companion followed and they met the clergyman half way.

"I am so glad to see you," the latter said, holding out his hand. "I am Mr. Wharton. My wife was so sorry that she could not meet you. She wished me to say that only an unavoidable complication prevents her from being here."

"Oh, please don't apologize," Fredericka said, sunnily; "there is nothing to apologize for. You see I was in good hands. I, too, regret the loss of the pleasure of a meeting," she concluded quaintly.

"Now, I suppose," the reverend gentleman went on, "like all young people, you'd like it over and done with as soon as possible—even if there were not the other reasons."

"Well, I did think I would like to take the 9:15 train home if I could," Fredericka said frankly; "you see there will be somebody there to meet that train and, though he's perfectly willing to wait over, still if I could——"

"You could go even earlier than that—as it happens," Mr. Wharton said affably. "Shall we go into the church?"

"Yes; I'd like to see what it's like," Fredericka said. "I'm not quite sure that my voice will carry. Perhaps I ought to rehearse a little."

"Oh, that's not necessary. Don't think of it. Now, suppose you both go in by the front entrance and I'll get the two maids, Mary and Ann. We shall need their assistance you know. It's dark there but I'll light the church as I come along."

"Very well," Fredericka agreed. She and Bennett turned where the walk branched away and shot forward in front of the church door. "Oh, it's such a load off my mind," she said, fervently, to her rescuer, as they stood within the dimly-lighted edifice; "and isn't he pleasant and nice? I'm sure I'm going to like him ever so much. You can't fancy how I dreaded it. I'm so afraid of strange people. But if all my experiences are going to be as pleasant as this—— Here he comes."

"Also Mary and Ann."

"I'm wondering why they don't hold it in the vestry."

"And I'm wondering," he meditated dreamily, "how old is Ann?"

The circles of pin-point light leaped into brilliant flame.

"Why," Fredericka exclaimed, surprisedly, "it isn't a Unitarian Church after all. He's in the gown of the Episcopalian clergyman."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it," Bennett commented; "however, if they're satisfied why should we complain? Why look a gift church in the mouth? And as for that, I'll settle the matter for posterity—I'll ask Ann."

They advanced leisurely up the broad central aisle. Mr. Wharton, followed by two neatly uniformed Irish girls, met them at the angle made by the junction of their two paths.

"Now," he commanded pleasantly, "if you will stand about where you are and Mary and Ann back, we're all ready to begin." His hand emerged from under one of his big sleeves. It held a little book. He opened it and began to read.

"Dearly beloved brethren," he said in tones suddenly sonorously ecclesiastical, "we are gathered here," etc.

Fredericka listened for a moment surprisedly. Then her face grew puzzled, then serious, then alarmed, then terrified.

"Mr. Bennett, Mr. Bennett," she shrieked; "stop him! stop him! Don't you understand what he's doing? He's marrying us."

"Marrying us!" Bennett repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Marrying you!" Mr. Wharton echoed. "Of course, I am. Isn't that what you're here for?"

Fredericka started back aghast. "Oh, there's some dreadful mistake," she said piteously; "I came here because there was, or I thought there was, to be a church social here this evening. I am a story teller. They engaged me to tell stories."

Mr. Wharton stared at her. "Aren't you Dorothy Stone?" he asked immediately.

"No, my name is Fredericka Gaston, and this is Mr. Bennett—a—a friend of mine."

"My dear young lady, let me apologize with all my heart," Mr. Wharton said seriously. "I have made—we both have made—a great mistake. But you will see, when I explain, how easy it was to do so. The daughter of a dear old friend of mine—a young woman whom I have never seen—wrote me a week ago, asking me if I would perform the marriage ceremony for her here to-night at 7. It is her mother who was my friend. Her father I had never met. He disapproves of the match very strongly. The mother looks upon it favorably. From all I have been able to gather, there was no reason why the young people should not be united, and I agreed to do it. When you drove up, I jumped to the conclusion that you were the bride and bridegroom. It's a curious coincidence—very."

Bennett sat down in one of the pews and laughed until he coughed. "This beats all records up to date," he said; "only nobody'll believe it when I tell them."

Fredericka was still pale and trembling from her fright, but she hurriedly explained her plight to the clergyman.

He considered the situation carefully. "No, I've heard of no church social to-night," he said thoughtfully. "The only thing for you to do is exactly what you are doing—to visit all the churches and find out from the people in authority. Only," he ended smilingly, "don't let them marry you."

"I'll take care of that." Fredericka was beginning to smile, too. "I'll announce the very first thing that——"

She was interrupted. Two men dashed into the church and made their way up the aisle.

"There they are now," the foremost one said. He was a tall, heavily built man. His upright white hair seemed to be bristling angrily away from his red, excited face. "If you've married those two children, sir," he thundered at Mr. Wharton, "I'll see what the law can do about it, if it takes every cent I have in the world. Why, it's not Dorothy," he ended in a surprised voice.

His companion looked nonplussed. He was a legal-looking person, thin and pale, with lantern jaws and eagle features.

"Come, Miss Gaston, we'll get out of here," Mr. Bennett said, a note of quiet determination in his voice; "you've got nothing to do with this. Good-night, Mr. Wharton."

He hurried her out of the church into the automobile. They started briskly forward. For a few moments they were both silent.

"Do you realize that it's only by the grace of God and your speedy interruption that we're not husband and wife at this moment?" he asked her suddenly.

"Realize!" Fredericka repeated quaveringly. "I can't get it out of my mind. It gives me the queerest feeling just to think of it. Can you imagine anything more awful?"

"It's harder to think of anything more pleasant," he said, after reflection. "Mrs. Arden Bennett, Fredericka Bennett," he murmured under his breath.

Fredericka blushed, but she laughed, too, after a pause. "Now, when you return to the West," she complained, "you'll tell your friends that the female majority in Massachusetts is so large that the women are fairly desperate. You will say that a girl took you into a church one day and nearly married you before you realized what was happening."

"I shall tell them some things about the girls in Massachusetts, but not that," he apprised her briefly.

"Where are we going now?" she demanded.

"To the real Unitarian Church this time. That information bureau at the station was a misinformation bureau. But at the same time our Sherlock Holmes method of research is vindicated. I think we'll strike it right this time. Only if they take me for a baby and want to christen me will you promise to stop them?"

"I don't think anything else will happen to us," Fredericka prophesied grimly. "Where do you suppose the real bride and bridegroom are?" she queried curiously.

"Search me!" he permitted cheerfully. "They're probably in some other of the wonderful churches in this town, being buried by mistake."

"I'm awfully sorry for them," she sighed. "They may never have another chance to elope. Do you know I have a great deal of sympathy with runaway marriages. I'd do anything in my power to help them." She was quiet for a few seconds, her downcast lids and drooping lips indicating the compassionate tenor of her thoughts. "I hope I shall tell my stories well to-night," she said, rousing herself with a sigh. "Would you mind if I told you one for practice?"

"Mind! It would be more fun than a bag of snakes. Please do."

"You see, I want to be sure of telling one story that will take, a story that will make a hit; a story they'll all repeat to their families when they go home; something that's original, that they can't get in books anywhere. All my other stories are second-hand. Don't you see, that's the way to get known? If I tell one winning story, people will tell it, and tell it, and tell it. And when they want somebody to address the women's club or the kindergarten, they'll think of me. Oh, yes, I must be sure to have a story that will take."

"I tell you what you do, Miss Gaston; you come out to Colorado, and when the boys want a smoke-talk some night, I'll get them to hire you. See here, I'll guarantee you a hundred dollars and expenses."

Fredericka's gay laugh rang out like a chime of bells. "What a delicious suggestion," she said. "I wish you might see Bob's face when I tell him about it."

"Well, if you scorn my aid, go on with your story."

"Oh, what a pretty girl!" Fredericka exclaimed suddenly.

Bennett stared up the road. A man and a girl were walking swiftly toward them. The man was nondescript. The girl was tall and blond. She wore a gray walking skirt and a pink shirt waist. She was carrying her hat in her hand. The level rays of the setting sun were reveling in the gold of her hair. She had clean-cut features and a decided almost haughty expression. Her cheeks mimicked the pink of the bunch of roses at her waist. Neither she nor her escort paid the slightest attention to the automobile. And even less, apparently, did they notice the rapid pounding of the hoofs of the horses that were approaching from farther back. Fredericka turned idly. The carriage had just made a bend in the road. In it were two men, one heavily-built, with thick, white hair, bristling angrily away from a red, excited face.

"I'm sorry we tried to come by electric," the pretty blond girl was saying in clear thin tones. "You see we're over half an hour late and there's no knowing how many engagements Mr. Wharton has for the evening. He may have had to go somewhere—and then, there's always father to think of."

"Oh, stop, stop," Fredericka cried, laying her hand on her companion's arm. She leaned over the side of the automobile. Are you Miss Dorothy Stone," she asked earnestly.

The girl jumped. "Why, yes," she said, "I am, but how—what——"

"Your father is behind us in a carriage," Fredericka interrupted. "Don't you see them? Get into the automobile and we'll take you to another minister's. We know all about it—we've just left Mr. Wharton. Your father had come there to prevent the marriage. You will help them, won't you?" she appealed strenuously to Bennett.

"Of course I will," Bennett said promptly. "Here, get in, get in. Quick! They're on to us back there. Hear how much faster they're driving. Well, we'll show them what we can do. I'm sorry for them, but I'm afraid they'll have to take our dust."

The race was an exciting one. But the automobile won, as Mr. Irwin, the prospective bridegroom, said, "hands down." It leaped forward and, gradually acquiring its greatest speed, it shot straight through the town to its farthest end. At first there was, between the two girls, some sort of broken conversation, confused explanations, suggestions, and advice. But as their gait waxed almost terrific, and the tiny stones of the road pelted their faces, they became silent, bending over and burying their heads in their arms.

"We win," Bennett said briefly as they drew up in front of another church. They rushed into the parsonage and explained matters to the bewildered clergyman they found there busy with his next Sunday's sermon. How he came over to consent to perform the ceremony is a matter for wondering conjecture. Perhaps it was their evident distress and sincerity that won him, perhaps he was, as much as Fredericka and Bennett, charmed with the romance of the situation. Perhaps the suddenness of their onslaught upon him deprived him of any conscious volition in the matter. In any case, the look, common to them all, of birth and breeding, and their use of Mr. Wharton's name must have helped their cause materially. Whatever the influences urging him to it, however, consent he did, and the runaway pair were united. The last word was said just as panting horses, wet with sweat and foam, drove up, dragging a buggy containing two angry men.

Fredericka and Bennett waited only for hasty farewells, to exchange good wishes and addresses. Then, as before, Bennett hurried his companion into the automobile.

"There's no need of our getting into that fuss," he said safely; "it's their funeral—I mean wedding. It isn't as if we could do anything further. Well, what do you suppose will happen next?" he asked tranquilly, when they were moving along at a respectable speed. "There are three more churches you know. I bet you two to one they try to divorce us next."

"Oh, I can't think of anything," Fredericka declared joyously, "but how happy I am that those two young people are safely married. Isn't it romantic? Isn't it charming? Don't you positively glow with the consciousness of a worthy action done, and all that sort of thing? I just do. Wasn't she sweet and dear?"

"Very charming girl," Bennett said perfunctorily.

"And I like him quite as well, too. They're married. They're married. Think of that! They're married."

"Of course, they're married," Bennett asserted morosely. "Everybody's married but me. Nobody'll marry me. Nobody wants me. They repudiate me at the very altar. They take me away to all the churches in town and flash these runaway matches before my eyes, but marry me—never. I know I'm doomed to die a lonely old bachelor."

"I'm still trying to think up a story," Fredericka announced demurely; "a story that will take. Don't you know one? A perfect love of a story, a little jewel of a story, a delicious bon bouche of a story. Didn't you ever have some sort of romantic adventure? Didn't you ever see a ghost? Didn't you——"

"See here," he interrupted, "you were going to tell me a story just before the wedding—the last one—not ours. Won't you tell it now? That's a good child."

"If ever anybody deserved a story," Fredericka said sweetly. "Well listen! Once upon a time——"

She told the story to the very end. During the process they visited all of the remaining churches, and not one of them was to have an entertainment that night.

"Well, the situation does look serious," Bennett admitted. "Now, let me see. Everybody we've asked swears that there are only six churches in the town. There's no reason why they should deceive us. There's nothing to be ashamed of in a church. It isn't like a family skeleton. Are you sure you didn't hear the woman's name?"

Fredericka shook her head.

"Are you sure she said Walden?" Bennett pursued her. "Wasn't it Malden?"

Fredericka thought a minute. Then she hung her head. "I don't know," she faltered. "I'm an awful goose," she acknowledged, meekly; "but it's taught me a lesson. I'll be businesslike enough in the future, you may be sure."

"Perhaps they're sending down to the station to every train," Bennett suggested suddenly; "there's one due about 7:55. Suppose we get down there in time to meet it, and then if there's nobody there——"

"I can catch the 8:15 back to Boston," Fredericka finished for him.

"No, we'll auto back to town and get something to eat, shall we?"

"Oh, no," Fredericka demurred faintly. "I couldn't do that."

"We'll auto into town," he promulgated sternly, "pick up Bob, and get something to eat. Remember, you're almost my wife. You came very near promising to love, honor and obey. You owe me something for throwing me down like that before Mary and Ann." He waited. She did not again dissent. "Here—here's a road that will take us to the station. It looks like a pretty road, too." They turned into it.

It was a pretty road. There were on it big comfortable houses, set at comfortable intervals from each other. There were lawns of velvet in front and beautiful gardens at the back. Behind these there were groves of trees running up to the top of a low range of hills. People were coming out of all the houses, the men in cool-looking ducks and flannels, the women in fluffy muslins and delicate, rustling silks. They were all going in the same direction and they laughed and talked with each other as they went.

"I think there must be some merry-making round here somewhere," Fredericka observed sadly.

"A dance, I fancy," Bennett said, "Oh, there it is."

The curve in the road had sunk away. In front of them was a big house, set in stately horse-chestnuts. It looked as if a conflagration were proceeding within; every one of its many windows was bursting with light. The broad piazzas, the paths and driveway were strung with Japanese lanterns; and circles and squares and triangles of them made geometric treasure-trove of the trees. Boys, mounted on ladders, were lighting them. They looked like bubbles of fire, smeared, in patches of strange color, with the stranger symbols of the Orient. Even the vivid splendors of the afterglow could not pale them. The lawns were dotted with people. There was a steady stream of them proceeding up the driveway. A very pretty woman, in a floating ruffled gown, walking briskly down a side path to meet a group of young people, reached the gate as Fredericka and Bennett approached.

"Is that you, Hilda?" she asked, leaning her round bare arms on the wall top. "Only fancy that Miss Gaston has not come. I sent over to the train, but she wasn't there. Edna said she was a little late in getting to the train, but she was sure she could not have missed her, because she met nobody walking from the station. Isn't it strange? We've telephoned her, and telephoned her, but we can't get anybody. We're awfully disappointed."

Fredericka involuntarily gripped Bennett's arm. "I am Miss Gaston," she said in her clear little voice.

"Oh, Miss Gaston, how glad I am to see you. I am Miss French. Do come right in. You didn't come on that 6:15 train, did you?"

"Oh, yes, I came then." Fredericka plunged into her explanation. "And we've been all this time trying to find out at what church the affair was to be held," she concluded.

"Oh, I see what the trouble is," Miss French said. "I didn't say a church. I said at the home of Mrs. Church. This is Mrs. Church's house. Oh! I am so sorry. You must have had a dreadful time. Come right into the house. Won't you come, too, Mr. Bennett? Mrs. Church will be delighted to have you stay, I know. There's going to be dancing afterward. You must be nearly starved, both of you. I'll get you some coffee and sandwiches immediately. You've plenty of time. You needn't feel worried one atom, Miss Gaston. It's not 8 yet, and you shall have a half an hour to rest. There is to be a violin solo and a trio of songs before you begin, anyway."

"I'm going to stay," Bennett whispered in Fredericka's ear, after he had formally accepted the invitation. "I simply must go home with you now. You've got my expectations up so about meeting Bob."

"Very well," Fredericka murmured bewilderedly; "do whatever you wish. I'm prepared for anything now."

Later, however, when she had had a chance to wash her face and comb her hair, she recovered her poise. She rejoined Bennett in the big dining-room. They sat cozily alone, opposite each other, at a tiny tete-a-tete table. The room was dimly lighted. The sound of the violin came from outside, plaintively piercing the ripples of laughter and murmurous talk.

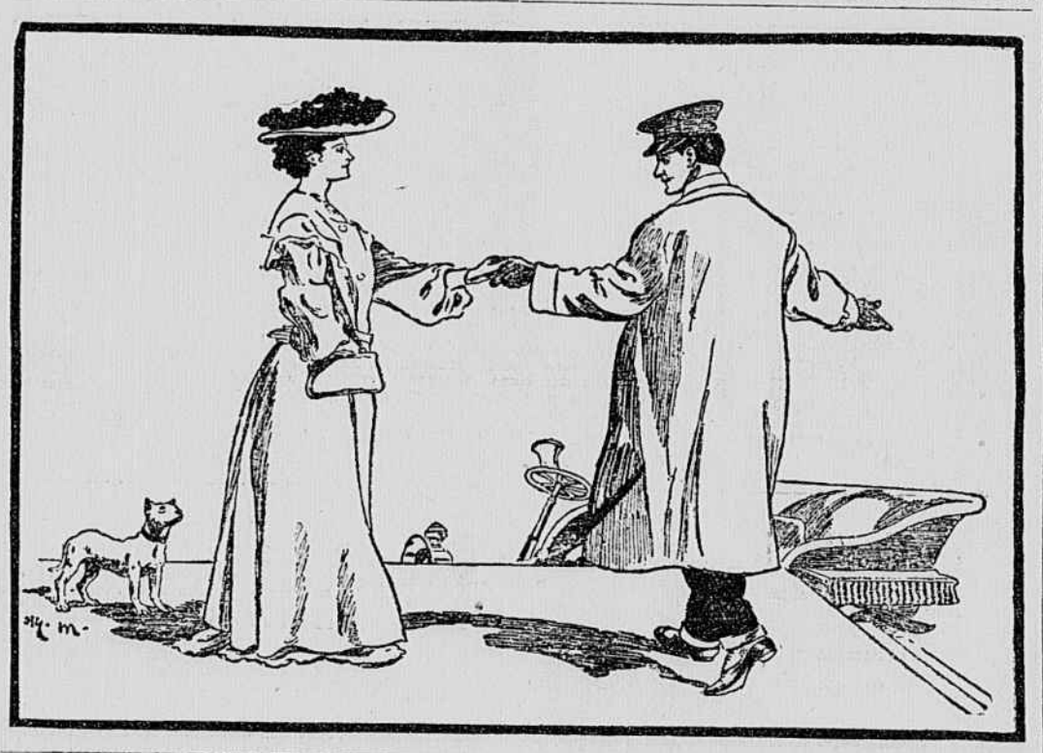
Fredericka had taken her long cloak off. Her cheeks had turned pink under the vigor of her toweling. Her eyes shone happily. The light changed the curls at the ears to little spirals of bronze. She was wearing a yellow mull gown that stopped just above her elbows and rounded away from her slender neck, displaying with perfidious cunning the distracting dimples that lurked in every colgn of vantage.

"Did you ever taste such sandwiches?" she asked suddenly. "I've eaten six already."

"That's nothing," he announced serenely. "I've eaten thirty. But that isn't as bad as it sounds. It takes two to make a bite."

"There's only one thing that troubles me," she said sadly, "and that is that I haven't a story that will take."

But after all, there was a story that took. Bennett, standing at the farther end of the huge glassed-in piazza, had a chance to realize this. They were all well told and well received. Fredericka had the sympathy of her audience from the moment the first clear word fell from her lips until she concluded, softly, "And so they lived happily ever after." But there was one story that made a pronounced hit, a story whose narration was punctuated with smiles and bursts of laughter, and whose close was greeted with mirth-ridden applause. It took with the very young. It took with the middle-aged. It took even with the old. This is it.



TWO OF A TRADE.

"Don't you charge that man anything for your services, doctor?"

"Not in cash. He's my butcher, and I take it out in trade."

"Ah, I see. Professional courtesy."—Toledo Blade.